Methods of material handling have changed significantly in recent years. Large warehouses are increasingly automated, using equipment such as computerized conveyor systems, robots, computer-directed trucks, and automatic data storage and retrieval systems. Automation, coupled with the growing use of hand-held scanners and personal computers in shipping and receiving departments, has increased the productivity of these workers.

Despite technology, job openings will continue to arise due to increasing economic and trade activity, and because certain tasks cannot be automated. For example, someone needs to check shipments before they go out and when they arrive to ensure everything is in order. In addition to job growth, openings will occur because of the need to replace shipping, receiving, and traffic clerks who leave the occupation. Because this is an entry-level occupation, many vacancies are created by normal career progression.

Related Occupations

Shipping, receiving, and traffic clerks record, check, and often store materials that a company receives. They also process and pack goods for shipment. Other workers who perform similar duties are stock clerks, material clerks, distributing clerks, routing clerks, express clerks, expediters, and order fillers.

Sources of Additional Information

General information about shipping, receiving, and traffic clerks can be obtained from:

☛ National Retail Federation, 325 Seventh St. NW., Suite 1000, Washington, DC 20004. Internet: **http://www.nrf.com/nri/**

(See introduction to the section on material recording, scheduling, dispatching, and distributing occupations for information on working conditions, training requirements, and earnings.)

Stock Clerks

(O*NET 49021, 58023, and 58026)

Nature of the Work

Stock clerks receive, unpack, check, store, and track merchandise or materials. They keep records of items entering or leaving the stock room and inspect damaged or spoiled goods. They sort, organize, and mark items with identifying codes, such as prices or stock or inventory control codes, so that inventories can be located quickly and easily. In larger establishments, where they may be responsible for only one task, they are called *inventory clerk*, *stock-control clerk*, *merchandise distributor*, *order filler*, *property custodian*, or *storekeeper*. In smaller firms, they may also perform tasks usually handled by shipping and receiving clerks. (A separate statement on shipping, receiving, and traffic clerks appears elsewhere in this section of the *Handbook*.)

Stock clerks are responsible for sorting, organizing, and marking items with identifying codes so that inventories can be located quickly and easily in warehouses and stores.

In many firms, stock clerks use hand-held scanners connected to computers to keep inventories up to date. In retail stores, stock clerks bring merchandise to the sales floor and stock shelves and racks. In stockrooms and warehouses, they store materials in bins, on floors, or on shelves. They may also be required to lift cartons of various sizes.

Employment

Stock clerks held about 2.3 million jobs in 1998, with about 80 percent working in wholesale and retail trade. The greatest numbers were employed in grocery and department stores, respectively. Jobs for stock clerks are found in all parts of the country, but most work in large urban areas that have many large suburban shopping centers, warehouses, and factories.

Job Outlook

Job prospects for stock clerks should be favorable even though employment is expected to grow more slowly than the average for all occupations through 2008. Because this occupation is very large and many jobs are entry level, numerous job openings will occur each year to replace those who transfer to other jobs or leave the labor force.

The growing use of computers for inventory control and the installation of new, automated equipment are expected to slow growth in demand for stock clerks. This is especially true in manufacturing and wholesale trade, industries whose operations are automated most easily. In addition to computerized inventory control systems, firms in these industries rely more on sophisticated conveyor belts and automatic high stackers to store and retrieve goods. Also, expanded use of battery-powered, driverless, automatically guided vehicles can be expected.

Employment of stock clerks who work in grocery, general merchandise, department, apparel, and accessories stores is expected to be somewhat less affected by automation because much of their work is done manually on the sales floor and is difficult to automate. In addition, the increasing role of large retail outlets and warehouses, as well as catalogue, mail, telephone, and Internet shopping services should bolster employment of stock clerks and order fillers in these sectors of retail trade.

Related Occupations

Workers who also handle, move, organize, and store materials include shipping and receiving clerks, distributing clerks, routing clerks, stock supervisors, and cargo checkers.

Sources of Additional Information

State employment service offices can provide information about job openings for stock clerks. Also, see clerical and sales occupations elsewhere in the *Handbook* for sources of additional information.

General information about stock clerks can be obtained from:

☛ National Retail Federation, 325 Seventh Street NW., Suite 1000, Washington, DC 20004. Internet: **http://www.nrf.com/nri/**

(See introduction to the section on material recording, scheduling, dispatching, and distributing occupations for information on working conditions, training requirements, and earnings.)

Office and Administrative Support Supervisors and Managers

(O*NET 51002A and 51002B)

Significant Points

- Most jobs are filled by promoting individuals from within the organization, very often from the ranks of clerks they subsequently supervise.

- Office automation will cause employment in some office and administrative support occupations to slow or even decline, but supervisors are more likely to retain their jobs because of their relatively higher skills and longer tenure.
- Applicants for office and administrative support supervisor or manager jobs are likely to encounter keen competition because their number should greatly exceed the number of job openings.

Nature of the Work

All organizations need timely and effective office and administrative support to operate efficiently. Office and administrative support supervisors and managers coordinate this support. These workers are employed in virtually every sector of the economy, working in positions as varied as customer services manager, chief telephone operator, and shipping-and-receiving supervisor.

Although specific functions of office and administrative support supervisors and managers vary considerably, they share many common duties. For example, supervisors perform administrative tasks to ensure that their staffs can work efficiently. Equipment and machinery used in their departments must be in good working order. If the computer system goes down or a facsimile machine malfunctions, they must try to correct the problem or alert repair personnel. They also request new equipment or supplies for their department when necessary.

Planning the work of their staff and supervising them is a key function of this job. To do this effectively, the supervisor must know the strengths and weaknesses of each member of the staff, as well as the required level of quality and time allotted to each job. They must make allowances for unexpected absences and other disruptions by adjusting assignments or performing the work themselves if the situation requires it.

After allocating work assignments and issuing deadlines, office and administrative support supervisors oversee the work to ensure that it is proceeding on schedule and meets established quality standards. This may involve reviewing each person's work on a computer, as in the case of accounting clerks, or, in the case of customer services representatives, listening to how they deal with customers. When supervising long-term projects, the supervisor may meet regularly with staff members to discuss their progress.

Office and administrative support supervisors also evaluate each worker's performance. If a worker has done a good job, the supervisor records it in the employee's personnel file and may recommend a promotion or other award. Alternatively, if a worker is performing poorly, the supervisor discusses the problem with the employee to determine the cause and helps the worker improve his or her performance. This might require sending the employee to a training course or arranging personal counseling. If the situation does not improve, the supervisor may recommend a transfer, demotion, or dismissal.

Office and administrative support supervisors usually interview and evaluate prospective clerical employees. When new workers arrive on the job, supervisors greet them and provide orientation to acquaint them with the organization and its operating routines. Some supervisors may be actively involved in recruiting new workers, for example, by making presentations at high schools and business colleges. They may also serve as the primary liaisons between their offices and the general public through direct contact and by preparing promotional information.

Supervisors also help train new employees in organization and office procedures. They may teach new employees how to use the telephone system and operate office equipment. Because much clerical work is computerized, they must also teach new employees to use the organization's computer system. When new office equipment or updated computer software is introduced, supervisors retrain experienced employees in using it efficiently. If this is not possible, they may arrange for special outside training for their employees.

Office and administrative support supervisors and managers train new employees in office procedures.

Office and administrative support supervisors often act as liaisons between the clerical staff and the professional, technical, and managerial staff. This may involve implementing new company policies or restructuring the workflow in their departments. They must also keep their superiors informed of their progress and abreast of any potential problems. Often this communication takes the form of research projects and progress reports. Because they have access to information such as their department's performance records, they may compile and present these data for use in planning or designing new policies.

Office and administrative support supervisors also may have to resolve interpersonal conflicts among the staff. In organizations covered by union contracts, supervisors must know the provisions of labor-management agreements and run their departments accordingly. They may meet with union representatives to discuss work problems or grievances.

Working Conditions

Office and administrative support supervisors and managers are employed in a wide variety of work settings, but most work in clean, well-lit, and usually comfortable offices.

Most work a standard 40-hour week. Because some organizations operate around the clock, office and administrative support supervisors may have to work nights, weekends, and holidays. Sometimes supervisors rotate among the three shifts; in other cases, shifts are assigned on the basis of seniority.

Employment

Office and administrative support supervisors and managers held over 1.6 million jobs in 1998. Although jobs for office and administrative support supervisors are found in practically every industry, the largest number are found in organizations with a large clerical work force such as banks, wholesalers, government agencies, retail establishments, business service firms, and insurance companies. Due to the need in most organizations for continuity of supervision, few office and administrative support supervisors and managers work on a temporary or part-time basis.

Training, Other Qualifications, and Advancement

Most firms fill administrative and office support supervisory and managerial positions by promoting clerical or administrative support workers within their organization. To become eligible for promotion to a supervisory position, clerical or administrative support workers must prove they are capable of handling additional responsibilities. When evaluating candidates, superiors look for strong teamwork, problem solving, leadership, and communication skills, as well as determination, loyalty, poise, and confidence. They also look for

more specific supervisory attributes, such as the ability to organize and coordinate work efficiently, set priorities, and motivate others. Increasingly, supervisors need a broad base of office skills coupled with personal flexibility to adapt to changes in organizational structure and move among departments when necessary.

In addition, supervisors must pay close attention to detail in order to identify and correct errors made by the staff they oversee. Good working knowledge of the organization's computer system is also an advantage. Many employers require postsecondary training—in some cases, an associate's or even a bachelor's degree.

A clerk with potential supervisory abilities may be given occasional supervisory assignments. To prepare for full-time supervisory duties, he or she may attend in-house training or take courses in time management or interpersonal relations.

Some office and administrative support supervisor positions are filled with people from outside the organization. These positions may serve as entry-level training for potential higher-level managers. New college graduates may rotate through departments of an organization at this level to learn the work of the organization.

Job Outlook

Like other supervisory occupations, applicants for office and administrative support supervisor or manager jobs are likely to encounter keen competition because the number of applicants should greatly exceed the number of job openings. Employment of office and administrative support supervisors and managers is expected to grow about as fast as the average for all occupations through 2008. In addition to the job openings arising from growth, a larger number of openings will stem from the need to replace workers who transfer to other occupations or leave this large occupation for other reasons.

Employment of office and administrative support supervisors is primarily affected by the demand for clerical workers. Despite an increasing amount of clerical work, the spread of office automation should allow a wider variety of tasks to be performed by fewer office and administrative support workers. This will cause employment in some clerical occupations to slow or even decline, leading supervisors to have smaller staffs and perform more professional tasks. However, office and administrative support managers still will be needed to coordinate the increasing amount of clerical work and make sure the technology is applied and running properly. In addition, organizational restructuring continues to reduce some middle management positions, distributing more responsibility to office and administrative support supervisors. This added responsibility combined with relatively higher skills and longer tenure will place office and administrative support supervisors and managers among the clerical workers most likely to retain their jobs.

Earnings

Median annual earnings of full-time office and administrative support supervisors were $31,090 in 1998; the middle 50 percent earned between $23,950 and $40,250. The lowest paid 10 percent earned less than $19,060, while the highest paid 10 percent earned more than $52,570. In 1997, median earnings in the industries employing the largest numbers of office and administrative support supervisors were:

Federal government	$49,200
Local government, except education and hospitals	30,600
Hospitals	29,700
Offices and clinics of medical doctors	29,200
Commercial banks	27,400

In addition to typical benefits, some office and administrative support supervisors in the private sector may receive additional compensation in the form of bonuses and stock options.

Related Occupations

Office and administrative support supervisors and managers must understand and sometimes perform the work of the people whom they oversee, including accounting clerks, cashiers, bank tellers, and telephone operators. Their supervisory and administrative duties are similar to those of other supervisors and managers.

Sources of Additional Information

For a wide variety of information related to management occupations, including educational programs, contact:

☛ American Management Association, 1601 Broadway, New York, NY 10019-7420. Internet: **http://www.amanet.org**

☛ National Management Association, 2210 Arbor Blvd., Dayton, OH 45439. Internet: **http://www.nma1.org**

Office Clerks, General

(O*NET 55347)

Significant Points

- Although most jobs are entry level, previous office or business experience may be required for some positions.
- Plentiful job opportunities should stem from employment growth, the large size of the occupation, and turnover.

Nature of the Work

Rather than performing a single specialized task, the daily responsibilities of a general office clerk change with the needs of the specific jobs and the employer. Whereas some clerks spend their days filing or typing, others enter data at a computer terminal. They can also be called upon to operate photocopiers, fax machines, and other office equipment; prepare mailings; proofread copies; and answer telephones and deliver messages.

The specific duties assigned to a clerk vary significantly, depending upon the type of office in which a clerk works. An office clerk in a doctor's office, for example, would not perform the same tasks as a clerk in a large financial institution or in the office of an auto parts wholesaler. Although they may sort checks, keep payroll records, take inventory, and access information, clerks also perform duties unique to their employer, such as organizing medications, making transparencies for a presentation, or filling orders received by fax machine.

The specific duties assigned to a clerk also vary by level of experience. Whereas inexperienced employees make photocopies, stuff envelopes, or record inquiries, experienced clerks are usually given additional responsibilities. For example, they may maintain financial or

General office clerks hold over 3 million jobs.